



SAMPLER

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN READING

Make Partnerships Part of the Story

**Read with me to open the door.
By reading together, I learn more!**

Today, just about all schools set measurable goals in their school improvement plans for student success in reading and literacy. Harnessing extra resources and support with family and community involvement helps more students reach these goals. Well-designed and well-implemented involvement activities encourage youngsters to value, share, and enjoy reading, writing, and other language arts.

Research indicates that programs and practices of partnership make a difference in whether, how, and which families are involved in their children's education. Partnership activities support excellent teaching in school and out, and give students opportunities to practice and sharpen their reading, writing, and other language skills. With high-quality teaching *and* family and community support, more students will achieve reading and literacy goals and progress to the next level.

When schools provide good information to parents about the reading and language arts curricula,

more students learn that their families think reading, writing, spelling, grammar, speaking, and listening are important skills to master. By engaging community partners in reading activities, students learn that other adults enjoy reading and sharing stories.

The *Promising Partnership Practices* in this ***Sampler*** come from members of NNPS who, over the years, shared activities for family and community involvement in reading and writing. The examples, at all grade levels, for family nights, workshops, volunteer activities, and other creative partnerships focus on all six types of involvement in the NNPS framework: *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community*. The ***Sampler*** includes just a few of many excellent activities in our annual collections. For more ideas visit www.partnershipschools.org. Follow the paths to Success Stories and to a particular year's book. Then, click on Reading and Literacy.

✦ Recommendations from Research ✦

Research on school, family, and community partnerships suggests that educators consider the following when planning involvement activities that contribute to students' literacy development and reading achievement.

- ✦ Workshops should guide parents and other family partners to conduct shared reading activities with young children with a variety of books (e.g., storybooks, letter/word recognition, picture books, non-word books, and more) to help children develop the full range of reading and literacy skills.
- ✦ Volunteer programs should be coordinated with classroom instruction and curricular goals so that students receive extra help on skills they need in reading and literacy at their grade level.
- ✦ Schools at all levels should communicate clearly with parents about reading and literacy goals at each grade level, the child's status and progress, and how to help at home to maintain or increase learning.
- ✦ Teachers may design and assign homework that requires students to show and discuss what they are reading, writing, and thinking with a family partner.

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Review of Research: Family and Community Involvement in Reading

Steven B. Sheldon, NNPS Director of Research

Many studies have been conducted on the impact of family involvement with students on reading and literacy skill development. Here, we summarize a few main findings organized by children's grade level.¹ Research shows that, although practices differ in elementary, middle, and high schools, age-appropriate family and community involvement activities help students improve their reading and literacy skills at all grade levels.

Preschool and Primary Grades

Children's entry to formal schooling marks an important transition in learning and development. Studies show that parents can be guided successfully to be good partners with children in reading from infancy on. Reading together helps young children build positive attitudes about reading, writing, school, and learning.

Storybook Reading. Storybook reading is an important shared activity in the early grades. Many studies conclude that the *quality* of parent-child interactions in reading determines whether and how these activities affect children. Studies show that shared reading with storybooks can help students build vocabulary, listening, and comprehension skills, whereas books on teaching letters and words can help students increase alphabet knowledge, decoding, and invented spelling. It is important for preschools and elementary schools to guide parents in ways to use various books and activities to develop the full range of students' literacy skills.

Reading Volunteers. Although parent and community volunteers are common in the younger grades, research suggests that many volunteer programs are poorly coordinated with classroom curricula. Some studies found that children with volunteer tutors (e.g., reading buddies, formal tutors) had higher oral reading and word comprehension skills, and improved their reading skills over time, compared to peers who were not tutored. It is important for teachers to train reading volunteers so that time with students is coordinated with classroom teaching in order to maximize desired results.

Upper Elementary and Middle Grades

Most research on parent involvement in reading has been conducted in the early grades, but studies are accumulating that show that family and community involvement positively influences student achievement and other measures of success through high school. One study of third and fifth grade students from mainly African-American families with low incomes found that students in classrooms with teachers who more frequently involved families in learning activities at home had higher gains in reading achievement from one year to the next, compared to students in other teachers' classrooms.

Other interventions reinforce the importance of parental involvement in reading. For example, workshops that shared learning packets to guide parents in reading with students at home were associated with increased reading comprehension skills and reading achievement test scores for second through eighth graders. Also, a study of 71 Title I schools found that outreach to involve parents on several types of involvement was associated with improved reading achievement for students from grades three to five.


Parent Involvement and Adolescents' School Achievement

In studies based on data from a national sample of adolescents, several researchers found that students scored higher on reading achievement tests and/or earned higher grades in English if their parents discussed school and future plans, checked homework, and maintained high educational expectations. Parents' interest in and support for reading (and other school subjects) contributed to students' academic development through high school.

NNPS studies of the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) language arts intervention found that middle school students who completed more interactive homework assignments with a family partner had higher language arts report card grades and, over two years, higher reading arts achievement test scores than students in control (non-TIPS) classes. Other studies show that when high school teachers communicated frequently with parents, teens were more likely to increase reading achievement scores than when less communication occurred.

1) For details on these and other studies, see:
Sheldon, S. B. & Epstein, J. L. (2005). School programs of family and community involvement to support children's reading and literacy development across the grades. Pp. 107-138 in J. Flood & P. Anders (Eds.) *Literacy development of students in urban schools: Research and policy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association (IRA).

Sheldon, S. B. (2009). Improving student outcomes with school, family, and community partnerships: A research review. Pp. 40-56 in J. L. Epstein, J. L. et al. *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action, third edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.





A NIGHT AT THE OSCARS

STEVENS MIDDLE SCHOOL PASCO, WASHINGTON

In the evening twilight, as over 300 parents and students began to gather outside the doors of Stevens Middle School, a tingling sensation surged through the crowd. Anticipation mounted as rumors circulated of celebrities who'd been sighted on the school campus, all dressed in their finest gowns and suits. When 6:00 finally came around, the doors swung open, and down the red carpet they went, stepping into the blinding lights of the school hallway.

For the night, classrooms at Stevens were transformed into “venues,” each with a different theme and set of activities that related a connection between reading and the silver screen. A number of them were themed after books—including the immensely popular *Twilight*, *Because of Winn-Dixie* and *Marley & Me*—that had been adapted into movies.

Visitors were treated to images from video stills, information or trivia questions about the movies and their stars, human and animal alike, and re-creations of objects or scenes from the films. Like every room at A Night at the Oscars, all of these venues had been designed by the students themselves. For example, the *Because of Winn-Dixie* room included a “bottle tree,” into which ESL students had written positive messages that could be revealed with a flashlight.

Other venues provided other exciting opportunities. One, a celebrity Wax Museum, featured students who were dressed as figures from biographies they had recently read. When attendees pressed a paper button on the student's costume, the statue came to life and told, in the first person, that historical celebrity's story. The *Jeopardy* room pitted students against parents in a book-to-movie trivia contest for fun and prizes.

Attendees also had the opportunity to learn a little more about life in the movie industry from the Behind the Scenes room. Here, visitors learned about the range of career opportunities that happen off-screen, including screen writing.

In another room, a local newspaper reporter held a session on interviewing skills, and gave students pointers on how to write their own interviews.

The evening also provided the school an opportunity to share with parents some of the reading services available from the wider community. The school's computer lab was ready and loaded with a variety of reading-related web sites that parents could use as resources for any grade level; they also were shown how to use the school's Parent Portal software to keep up-to-date on their children's grades. Elsewhere, the public librarian managed a booth where families could sign up for library cards.

Finally, once guests decided it was time for intermission, the cafeteria offered sandwiches, chips, and punch, with live Mexican folk dancing provided by the school's Baille Folklorico dance troupe.

Of course, none of the night's successes would have been possible without joint efforts by the school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) and Parent-Teacher-Student Organization (PTSO). Spearheaded by the school's Literacy Coach, with a theme selected and designed by students, the annual Literacy Night took on a whole new life with the Night at the Oscars theme. The success of the event was apparent, based on how well it met the goal of Stevens' Balanced Literacy Action Plan: “to promote enthusiasm and student performance in relation to reading and writing.”

Based on students' thrill at seeing their hard work pay off, receiving rewards for attending and participating, and their parents' positive reactions to the event, it seems that, at this Oscar party, everyone was a winner.



Dr. Seuss on the Loose Family Reading Night

Oconto Elementary School
Oconto, Wisconsin

Dr. Seuss celebrated his birthday in style last March with the help of students from Oconto Elementary School. In honor of his 104th year, 90 students and 120 parents turned out for Dr. Seuss on the Loose Family Reading and Fun Night, perhaps the biggest reading event their small Wisconsin town had ever seen.

The Cat in the Hat was there, of course. As were guest readers, including the principal, the librarian, and parents. When participants got hungry, they could go to the *Green Eggs and Ham* Snack Shack and work off the calories at the *Fox in Socks* sock-hop with music by a local DJ. Many other activities, such as a book walk, craft tables, and displays of student-published books, kept the revelers busy.

While the youngsters busied themselves at the activity tables, members of the Action Team for Partnership (ATP) talked with parents about strategies for getting their children to read. The students each received a book, donated by the PTO, and a book mark they made, courtesy of a local stamp business.

"We felt that by offering a family friendly activity that was fun, it would bring the parents to schools and... show them the value of reading with their kids at home," said the school's family involvement coordinator.

The ATP got the project started by forming a Focus on Reading Team, which asked the local PTO to sponsor the reading night. Together, parents, teachers, and local library staff brainstormed ways to attract Oconto families.

With a little Internet research and some careful studying of NNPS's *Promising Partnership Practices* book, inspiration struck—Dr. Seuss was the answer.

The biggest challenge for the group was getting enough volunteers to support the event. Many responded to a flier sent home with children a few weeks before the event. Still others contacted the event's organizers via

e-mail to offer their time. The ATP signed up volunteers for 45-minute slots to ensure that everyone was able to spend at least half the evening enjoying the activities with their own children.

The school's teachers and administrators considered the event a success. The principal was impressed by the turnout. Many teachers were thrilled about the donated books. The program had another positive effect: it gave parents and community members the opportunity to meet socially.

Administrators at Oconto already have another family reading night in the works for next year, though the theme may change. Will it be zoo themed, have a haunted house motif, or perhaps feature creatures from under the sea? No one yet knows. But if there's one thing everyone does know, it's that these elementary students and their families will be anxious to attend.



FAMILY TRADITIONS READING NIGHT

**THOMAS JEFFERSON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
BELLFLOWER, CALIFORNIA**

Who doesn't, after all, love a holiday? The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) at Thomas Jefferson Elementary tapped into a universal topic for their Family Traditions Reading Night, making the evening a special occasion by asking students in grades K–6 to write about . . . special occasions.

Inspired by models in the NNPS book *Family Reading Night* (Hutchins, Greenfield, and Epstein 2008), the team designed a program that included reading activities, a book exchange, a presentation by the county's children's librarian, and refreshments. Central to the evening was an essay-writing contest that the students entered before the event.

The winners of the essay contest—selected by teachers based on children's response to the question, "What is your family's favorite holiday?"—were invited to read their essays aloud to the proud parents, students, and school staff. The opportunity for parents to hear what students had written affirmed their connection to what their children were learning in school. The assignment also prompted students to involve their parents in the writing process by asking for specifics about family traditions. By hearing these traditions honored before such a large audience, families were encouraged to feel they had a greater part in the Thomas Jefferson community.

ATP planners added the writing assignment to the program based on the academic needs demonstrated by the CA STAR assessment and district benchmarks. Reading comprehension was a specific target. With the other activities of the night, not only did the essay contest boost reading skills, it also resulted in the school's largest Reading Night turnout yet. "The cafeteria was filled to capacity," wrote the ATP facilitator. "There were many families who came who usually didn't attend family nights."

Students donned their pajamas and brought

their pillows. Many also brought a used book for the book exchange, at which hundreds of children swapped for something new to read. The librarian gave a presentation and handed out applications for library cards. The large turnout, which produced the greatest challenge (albeit a pleasant one), required a few last-minute changes. Instead of having the attendees go to classrooms for the teachers to read to them, one teacher read to all the students and families in the cafeteria. Parents and other volunteers set up, organized the exchange, and provided refreshments.

With all of the time and effort put in by the different groups, costs were minimal: \$50 in Title I funds. Due to the event's overwhelming success, the ATP hopes to recruit even more volunteers—and set aside more time for students to read their essays—for their Family Hero Reading Night in June.



IT'S RAINING PUDDING

VINTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL VINTON, LOUISIANA

Plop. Plop. Plop. Students of Vinton Elementary got to intern as weather reporters for an evening. They were tasked to piece together a story on a common occurrence: a rather unexceptional day, except that on this day, it happened to rain . . . chocolate pudding.

Pre-K–5th-graders were primed for the English and Language Arts (ELA) It's Raining Chocolate Pudding event by other stories about unusual forms of precipitation. Teachers read Felicia Bond's *The Day It Rained Hearts* to the lower grades, while the older students heard Judi Barrett's *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. These served as the appetizers for a writing event in which all students participated: to describe the sights, sounds, smells, and—of course—tastes of an imaginary torrent of the soft, fudgy dessert pudding.

The exercise dovetailed with a number of the school's ELA improvement goals that reflected the analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills assessed on the state's LEAP and ILEAP tests. Furthermore, parents got to experience aspects of their children's ELA education firsthand.

Parents were asked to participate with their children in every step of the process. After brainstorming in groups, students employed a “four-square” method to start writing, in which a sheet of paper is divided into four quadrants, with a fifth square drawn in the center. Lower grade levels—2nd and below—filled each portion of the diagram with a single sentence, with their topic sentence in the center. Upper grades—3rd and up—did the same, with whole paragraphs in each section. Students then used these sheets as guides to compose their final paragraph or essay on the aforementioned custard phenomenon.

In addition to inviting parents to get involved, students also were encouraged to participate in the planning process. Any student who attended the planning meeting received a copy of *The Day It Rained Hearts* from the teachers.

Total expenses, paid with Title I funds, were \$350. Organizers advise others who want to conduct a similar activity to ensure that students have enough time to complete the assignment and to secure sufficient space for all attendees.

The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) will ask local celebrities to read to students at future ELA events to generate more enthusiasm among students, parents, and the community at large.

Students relished the non-traditional writing prompt, as well as the opportunity to work in a more relaxed environment. For their efforts, students and parents were rewarded afterwards with—what else?—cups of chocolate pudding. Said one, “You could almost smell the chocolate pudding before we opened the packages.”



Letters from the Heart

*Horace Mann Elementary School
West Allis, Wisconsin*

The idea came from the “Absolutely Incredible Kid Day,” a day set aside for parents, teachers and community members to write a letter telling a child how wonderful he or she is. Horace Mann Elementary, a school in suburban Milwaukee, gave the national day a new twist, creating the Letters from the Heart event – a letter exchange that turned into a very special evening.

Letters from the Heart involved not only teachers and parents writing letters to children, but also students writing letters to their teachers and parents. In this way, the project helped students work on their writing skills. This related closely to one of the goals of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP): Help all students write proficiently on grade level.

The event also addressed the challenge of increasing parental leadership and involvement at the school. The school has a diverse population and more than three-quarters of its students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The ATP hoped that a good experience would make parents more willing to be involved. Writing letters allowed parents to interact positively with the school.

The activity proved good for everyone. The adults and students expressed feelings in their letters that they might not say in person. People were not shy about participating – more than 400 students and 400 adults wrote letters.

Letters from the Heart was also a learning experience. Beginning in February, teachers worked with their students on letter-writing skills, and gave them the opportunity to finish their letters in class. Parents, too, got help with their writing. For two weeks before the event, several ATP and staff members, including the librarian, held letter-writing workshops for parents, both before and after school. These workshops offered writing tips, computer access and a quiet space to work.

On the evening of the March PTA meeting, Letters from the Heart began with a pizza dinner sponsored by the PTA. After dinner, each family had its picture taken. Parents and students worked together to make a frame or card to hold the photo. The school also set up a reading room and encouraged families to enjoy reading a book together. These activities paled, however, to the evening’s big event – the letter exchange in the cafeteria.

“It felt as if time stopped and the world slowed down during this exchange,” said one organizer. “Seeing the smiles on each person’s face as they read their letter was a humbling and joyful experience. Hearts opened wide that night and the letters will stay with each child and parent forever.”

The event’s success was due in part to good publicity. Several letters were sent home to parents introducing the project, welcoming them to attend letter-writing workshops and the exchange. The PTA paid for the food and the Family Resource Center provided materials for the art project and the camera for family pictures. The cost was less than \$400.

Overall, the practice was a resounding success, according to everyone involved. Parents were positive about the practice and expressed their hopes that the school would repeat the event. The principal was thrilled. The teachers were proud to be a part of helping adults and children connect so meaningfully.



MEMORY MAKERS

T. H. WATKINS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
LAKE CHARLES, LOUISIANA

Looking to increase parent involvement at school events, coordinators at T. H. Watkins Elementary figured the best way to get more families to the school was to make the event *about* what makes each family unique—their stories. Tasked to bring only their favorite memories and their willingness to be inspired by their kids, parents joined their children at the school one evening for the first-ever Memory Makers Family Book Writing Event.

Citing research that connects parent involvement to better grades and test scores, the school's Curriculum Coordinator explained that the school drew its inspiration from an item that had been sold at the previous year's book fair. With a grant from the Junior League of Lake Charles and some PTO funding from the school (totaling \$2,800), event organizers bought a book-making kit for every T. H. Watkins student. These kits contained everything that the children, from grades Pre-K–5, would need to “publish” their own book about their family—everything, of course, except for the memories.

Teachers integrated the kits into their class curriculum, assigning the early stages of the project as classwork and homework assignments. First, teachers presented books that were written by children in order to motivate them to participate in the event. Students were also encouraged to involve their families in the homework assignments, in which they created “flow maps” to sequence the ideas of the story they would tell, followed by preparing the text that would appear in their own Memory Makers book.

All that remained was to illustrate the pages, and that is what the Memory Makers evening was designed to do. Two different evenings in March were set aside to give family members an opportunity to schedule the best time to “make memories” with their children. On the night of the event, families collaborated with their child in finishing a creative product using student-

produced materials and the kits for illustration.

Turnout for the first night was too large for the space that had been reserved—the school library—and so the crowd spilled over into two classrooms. As a result, the second evening event was held in the larger “commons” area of the school.

By working together, students benefited from positive and creative contacts with their family members. At the end of the night, everyone brought home a tangible reminder of the fun they had, both at the event and in sharing their family's history.

The evening closed after the books were bound and each family group read its story together. The school combined the Memory Makers event with a Book Fair. After the book-making was finished, parents and children proceeded to the book-buying area.

Compared to previous events with lower family attendance, the Memory Makers event was a measurable success, both in terms of numbers of participants and their qualitative assessments. Many expressed a desire to participate in a similar creative/collaborative event with their families. One parent said it best: “I learned that using my imagination plus my child's imagination is dangerously funny!”



Reading with Residents

*Samuel E. Hubbard Elementary School
Forsyth, Georgia*

Rosy-cheeked children from Samuel E. Hubbard Elementary brightened the lives of 80 nursing home residents last year during their long-standing Reading with the Residents series. Over the course of the last school year, the program sent 102 students to a local assisted-living home to entertain senior citizens by reading aloud their favorite books.

The school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) developed the field trips in 2002 to help boost students reading levels and strengthen community ties. Through reading to the elderly, they hoped students would develop a sense of pride in their education and respect for their elders. They knew seniors would appreciate the visit.

The program begins every year with a call to the nursing home's activities director. An ATP member works with the director to set dates for the monthly visits. Teachers receive a schedule for the year and information about the home to distribute to students. Each month a sign-up sheet circulates the classrooms. Teachers select two students from each class to visit the nursing home.

The ATP publicizes the event in the school's newsletter. Photos from the field trips are usually featured in the school year book. The local newspaper also features the program.

On field trip day, 10-14 students from grades K-5 hop on a bus and travel to the nursing home. Parent volunteers and ATP staff chaperone the students. On the bus, the ATP leader gives students a short talk on what to expect at the home. The group arrives at 10 a.m. and is immediately escorted to the home's cafeteria. Nursing home staff introduces the group and students take turns reading their favorite book or a story they wrote recently. After the readings, students and chaperones divide into smaller groups to read to room-bound residents. At the end of the visit, around 11:30, students gather back in the lobby where residents share the home's various resident pet

dogs, cats, and birds for the children's enjoyment. Students receive hugs and candy upon their noontime departure.

Community response to the project over the years has been overwhelmingly positive. "It has meant so much to our residents to have children visit each month and read to them... the hugs and smiles they receive from children mean much more than words ever could," the nursing home activities director wrote in a recent thank-you note.

"Our Reading with the Residents program is a world-class opportunity for children to be exposed to generational culture. It helps children build relationships with senior citizens. It also helps build character values, such as assisting others, respect, and a sense of community," the school's assistant principal shared.

The event costs \$250 to implement annually. The school uses Title I funds to cover the expenses—primarily associated with transportation.

The school plans to continue the program next year. They are looking for ways to increase the amount of time students spend at the nursing home, as well as increasing the number of participating students.



SHS Word of the Week

*Skyline High School
Idaho Falls, Idaho*

Wordplay took on a whole new meaning this spring for students at Skyline High School when school administrators introduced the new community-sponsored Word of the Week program.

The idea emerged at an Academic School Improvement meeting. Teachers were in search of a way to improve students' verbal SAT scores, but they wanted to move beyond the 'typical teen speak.' Skyline faculty and administration decided to involve the Idaho Falls community in a major vocabulary lesson by asking local businesses to sponsor a Word of the Week.

Every week a new word was presented at the high school. Its spelling, pronunciation, part of speech, and usage were posted on a sign hung in every classroom. Teachers encouraged students to use the featured word as much as possible during normal lessons.

Word of the Week community sponsors agreed to give students discounts on their services if students mentioned the word at the register. For example, Starbucks upsized students' drinks for free if they mentioned the word "alacrity." Hollywood Video, Arby's, Coca-Cola, and Office Depot/United Way also joined in on the fun. Some of these franchises asked students to use the vocabulary word in a sentence while others asked for a definition.

To test their cumulative knowledge, at the end of the year students took a Word of the Week quiz. Students who received top marks were awarded prizes, such as a digital camera, free movie tickets, Sonic gift card, or iTunes gift card. The contest was sponsored by Coca Cola and the school's Renaissance Club. More than 70% of the students who took the quiz won a free soda.

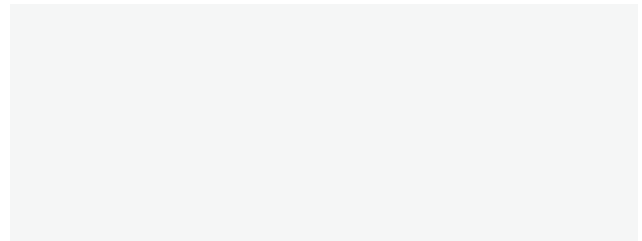
Some teachers thought some words (e.g., "licentious") were too racy for the contest. Over all though, most teachers supported the program whole-heartedly. Administrators listened to teachers' concerns and developed a

more rigorous vetting process for words.

Students found the program to be an enjoyable way of learning those daunting, archaic SAT words. "It expands our minds using words we would not normally be exposed to," one student said.

Teachers and school administrators reveled in the cooperative atmosphere the program created. "The best part about our Word of the Week program is that students, teachers, staff members, and community members all are learning and using the words together! It's a lot of fun watching adults and students incorporate words into their daily lives both in and outside of school," principal Trina Caudle said.

The program cost \$300 to implement. Administrators used district funds to cover the cost. They plan to continue the program next year and expand the number of community sponsors involved. Skyline High would also like to solicit students to help create the word list.





The Point O'View Reading Prize Patrol

*Point O'View Elementary School
Virginia Beach, Virginia*

Publishers Clearing House move over! The Point O'View Reading Prize Patrol is on its way! Bringing books, balloons and excitement, the Prize Patrol rewards families who read together.

Point O'View Elementary wanted to stress the importance of setting aside time everyday to read with its version of the Publishers Clearing House give-away. Families who pledged to read together every weeknight in February were entered in a drawing. During the last week of the month, six names were drawn for visits from the Reading Prize Patrol.

"We felt like celebrities when the reading patrol arrived at our door," said one lucky parent. "Neighbors came out and applauded when they heard the commotion. The gift basket was full of books for everyone in the family. We really enjoyed the time we spent reading together. Thank you very much."

Nearly 160 families, with about 200 elementary students, joined the fun. The Reading Prize Patrol gathered in front of each house and blew horns as the principal knocked on the front door. The patrol then presented families with a basket of books, a heart-shaped balloon bouquet and a giant award certificate. Surprised winners greeted the patrol with cries of disbelief and tears of appreciation.

In addition to the principal, the enthusiastic patrol included the assistant principal, teachers of winning students, language arts committee members and the school mascot. "This was a fun experience. It was a pleasure to be part of the Reading Prize Patrol," said one teacher. "The look on the face of my student as he came to the door was priceless! What a good time we had going from house to house together to surprise the families. Count me in next year!"

One of the school's community partners helped videotape the prize presentations,

which were aired on the school's television station. The partner also gave copies to the winning families.

"Reading is at the heart of learning, and reading fluently is one of the most important accomplishments of early school years," said one of the organizers. "This practice addressed the need . . . to establish a regular time at home to practice the important skill of reading."

The emphasis on reading led students to read more and may have helped improve their scores on statewide tests. Students also benefited emotionally and behaviorally from having parents spend quality time reading with them.

About \$100 in school funds paid for preschool board books, baskets, balloons and party horns. The school library used proceeds from its book fair to provide the other new books that were awarded.

The Reading Prize Patrol will be in Point O'View neighborhoods next year. The school hopes to involve more families, just as this year's participation topped last year's. The planners may arrange to have a drawing every month or expand the activity to include other subjects. The school will solicit donations from community members and invite them to be part of the patrol.



Whitney's Coffee House/Poetry Night

*Whitney M. Young School
Cleveland, Ohio*

Aspiring poets rhymed their way deeper into their parents' hearts last February, during the Whitney M. Young School's Coffee House/Poetry Night.

The school's family liaison came up with the idea to involve parents and children in an enjoyable, non-stressful activity outside of the classroom. It was also intended to further the school's goal of improving students' reading and writing.

The liaison helped the school's English teachers plan a poetry reading for students in grades 8 to 12, following a unit they taught on poetry. In these classes, teachers encouraged students to write their own poems on topics of their choice. At the end of the unit, teachers asked students to participate in the poetry reading, sending home permission slips with interested students.

The school used fliers, newsletters, and e-mails to publicize the poetry reading—a first for the Young school.

On the evening of the event, teachers and staff transformed the school's media center into a coffee house, reminiscent of Beat generation hangouts. They decorated the tables with cloths and centerpieces and hung student artwork on the walls. The coffee house menu offered sandwiches, pastries, coffee and punch for the 5:30 to 7 p.m. event. About 60 parents and community members attended, and 34 students participated by reading their original poems on relationships, family life, religion, and other topics.

"Students were able to express themselves and actually be themselves," said Ms. Wright, commenting on one of the many benefits of the reading.

At the end of the night, the audience gave the young poets a standing ovation. The adults were thrilled to see how creative the students could be. "They loved it," the liaison commented. Many parents were sad that they did not have copies of the students' poems

to keep, and they encouraged the teachers to publish them in a book.

The refreshments cost about \$200—the only expense for this project. The school covered these costs with money from the school budget.

The school plans to make the poetry reading an annual event. Next year it wants to expand the reading to involve all students, grades 6 to 12, and plans to schedule the poetry unit earlier in the school year.

To encourage other schools, the liaison said simply, "Just do it. It was a wonderful practice and everyone loved it."